

Sampford Brett Parish Council

Adopted May 2026, Appendices Adopted June 2026
Review date May 2028



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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Sampford Brett Parish Council

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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1. Introduction

The Parish Council is committed to working in an open, transparent and inclusive way. This Community Engagement Policy sets out how the Council will communicate with residents, involve them in decision-making, and encourage participation in parish life. Effective engagement helps ensure that Council decisions reflect local needs and priorities.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The aims of this policy are to:

- Strengthen relationships between the Council and the community
- Improve understanding of the Council's role, responsibilities and decision-making processes
- Provide clear opportunities for residents to express their views
- Ensure that engagement is accessible, inclusive and proportionate
- Support community-led initiatives and local partnerships

3. Principles of Engagement

The Council will base its engagement activities on the following principles:

- Openness – Information will be shared clearly and promptly.
- Transparency – Decisions, actions and reasons will be communicated openly.
- Inclusivity – Engagement opportunities will be accessible to all residents.
- Respect – All views will be listened to and considered fairly.
- Proportionality – Engagement will be appropriate to the scale and impact of the issue.

4. Communication Methods

The Council will use a range of communication channels to keep residents informed, including:

- The Parish Council website
- Parish noticeboards
- Newsletters (printed or digital)
- Social media platforms, where used
- Public reports, agendas and minutes
- Direct correspondence where appropriate

The Council will aim to provide information in plain English and in formats accessible to as many residents as possible.

5. Opportunities for Public Participation

The Council will provide opportunities for residents to share their views through:

- Public participation at every Parish Council meeting, as required by legislation
- Consultations on significant issues or projects
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Community events, workshops or drop-in sessions where appropriate
- Written submissions from individuals or groups

The Council may hold **public meetings** for major issues, although these are optional and not a legal requirement.

6. Working with Community Groups and Partners

The Council recognises the value of local organisations and will:

- Maintain constructive relationships with community groups, schools, churches, clubs and voluntary organisations
- Support community-led initiatives where appropriate
- Seek opportunities for partnership working to benefit the parish

7. Engagement in Decision-Making

The Council will:

- Consider community views when making decisions
- Explain how feedback has influenced outcomes
- Ensure that significant proposals include appropriate consultation
- Provide clear information about how decisions are reached

8. Supporting Community Involvement

The Council will encourage residents to take part in parish life by:

- Promoting volunteering opportunities
- Supporting local events and activities
- Encouraging participation in neighbourhood planning or other long-term projects
- Welcoming constructive suggestions from residents

9. Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if required, to ensure it remains effective and reflects best practice in community engagement.

10. Adoption

This Community Engagement Policy was adopted by the Parish Council on 13 May 2026 and Appendices A, B & C 10 June 2026.

Sampford Brett Parish Council

Appendix A

DEDICATED FACEBOOK USER ACCOUNT POLICY



1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to improve communication with residents by enabling the Parish Council to share agendas, minutes, notices, and community updates directly into the existing “Sampford Brett Village” Facebook Group through a dedicated Facebook user account.

2. Creation of a Dedicated Account

- 2.1 The Parish Council approve the creation of a dedicated Facebook user account (e.g., “*Sampford Brett Parish Council*”) for the sole purpose of official Council communication.
- 2.2 The account will not represent an individual councillor and will be used only in an administrative capacity.

3. Administration and Access

- 3.1 The Clerk will hold and manage the login credentials for the account.
- 3.2 The Clerk is responsible for posting information on behalf of the Parish Council in accordance with this policy.
- 3.3 Login details must not be shared with any other person unless expressly authorised by the Council.

4. Permitted Use

The Facebook account may be used only to:

- Share agendas, minutes, meeting dates, and statutory notices
- Provide factual updates and information already in the public domain
- Share urgent or time-sensitive community information
- Promote Council-approved initiatives or consultations

All posts must be factual, neutral, directly relevant to Sampford Brett Parish and consistent with decisions of the Parish Council.

5. Prohibited Use

The Facebook account must not be used to:

- Engage in debate or discussion within the Facebook group
- Express personal opinions or political views
- Respond to comments or questions within the group (responses, where required, will be provided through formal Council channels)
- Share information not yet approved or released by the Council, **except for urgent factual notifications** such as roadworks, utility works, emergency alerts, or other time-sensitive public information where immediate publication is in the community interest.

6. Posting Protocol

- 6.1 All posts must be clear, accurate, and non-political.
- 6.2 Posts should reflect the formal position of the Parish Council and must not pre-empt Council decisions.
- 6.3 The Clerk may publish routine notices without prior approval; all other content must be authorised by the Chair/Vice-Chair or by Council resolution.

Sampford Brett Parish Council

Appendix B

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS POLICY



Public Attendance at Parish Council Meetings – Guidance

- Parish Council meetings are not public meetings, but members of the public have a statutory right to attend as observers.
- Members of the public do not have a legal right to speak during the meeting unless the Chair gives permission.
- As part of good community engagement, the Council may include a Public Participation session at an agreed point in the meeting, during which members of the public are invited to speak.
- Public Participation is separate from the formal Council meeting. Members of the public cannot take part in councillor debate, and the Council cannot make decisions in response to public comments on items not listed on the agenda.
- After the public session, members of the public are welcome to remain as observers but cannot join in discussions.
- The Council may pass a resolution to exclude the public for specific confidential items (e.g., staffing matters, tenders, or legal issues).

Rules for Public Participation

- Public Participation will last no longer than 10 minutes, unless extended at the discretion of the Chair.
- Each member of the public may speak for up to 3 minutes.
- If several people wish to speak on the same topic, they should nominate one spokesperson to avoid repetition and make best use of the allotted time.
- Any information or handouts brought to the meeting must be placed on the designated table to avoid delaying or disrupting proceedings.
- The Chair may rule any question or statement inappropriate and may require the speaker to stop. If the speaker refuses to comply, they may be asked to leave. If they still refuse, the Police may be called to remove them.
- Councillors and the Clerk will not respond to comments made during Public Participation. If the topic is on the agenda, it will be dealt with through the proper meeting process.
- Members of the public cannot require the Council or its Committees to add items to an agenda.
- Members of the public cannot dictate how matters are recorded in the minutes.
- Questions raised during Public Participation do not require a response, and there will be no debate by Councillors. The Chair will direct this.
- A brief record of topics raised will be included in the minutes of the meeting.
- All attendees must behave respectfully towards others. No behaviour that demeans, insults, threatens, or intimidates another person will be tolerated.
- All statements, questions, and responses must relate to the facts of the matter and must not be personal. No personal references to individuals will be permitted.
- Statements that are defamatory, discriminatory, or otherwise unlawful will not be permitted.

Behaviour at Meetings

Offensive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. If a member of the public disrupts the proceedings of any meeting, the Council reserves the right to curtail their contribution.

If a member of the public continues to disrupt the meeting after receiving two warnings from the Chair, a third warning will result in that person being asked to leave the meeting. If they refuse to leave when instructed, the Police will be called to remove them.

Sampford Brett Parish Council

Appendix C

PRESS CONTACT POLICY



1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure clear, accurate, and consistent communication between Sampford Brett Parish Council and the press. It sets out who may speak on behalf of the Council, how enquiries are handled, and the standards expected in all public statements.

2. Authorised Spokespersons

- 2.1 Only the following may speak to the press on behalf of the Parish Council:
- The Chair of the Parish Council
 - The Clerk, acting in an administrative and factual capacity
 - Another councillor formally authorised by the Council for a specific matter
- 2.2 Individual councillors must not speak to the press as if representing the Council unless expressly authorised.
- 2.3 Councillors may speak to the press in a personal capacity but must make it clear that they are expressing personal views, not the position of the Council.

3. Handling Press Enquiries

- 3.1 All press enquiries relating to Council business must be directed to the Clerk in the first instance.
- 3.2 The Clerk will:
- Acknowledge the enquiry
 - Determine whether a factual administrative response is appropriate
 - Refer the matter to the Chair where a formal Council position is required
 - Consult the Council if the enquiry relates to policy, decisions, or matters not yet resolved
- 3.3 No comment will be made on:
- Confidential items
 - Matters relating to staff
 - Ongoing investigations or legal issues
 - Items not yet considered by the Council

4. Standards for Public Statements

- 4.1 All statements made on behalf of the Council must be:
- Accurate
 - Factual
 - Neutral
 - Consistent with Council decisions
 - Within the Clerk's or Chair's delegated authority

- 4.2 Statements must not:
- Express personal or political opinions
 - Speculate on future Council decisions
 - Pre-empt agenda items
 - Misrepresent the Council's position
 - Criticise individual councillors, staff, or members of the public

5. Press Releases

- 5.1 Press releases may be issued to:
- Communicate Council decisions
 - Promote Council initiatives
 - Provide factual updates
 - Correct misinformation
- 5.2 Press releases will be drafted by the Clerk and approved by the Chair (or Vice-Chair in their absence).
- 5.3 No press release may be issued without approval.

6. Social Media and Online News

- 6.1 Statements to online news outlets or social media platforms are treated as press contact and must follow this policy.
- 6.2 The Council's official Facebook user account may only publish factual updates already approved for public release.

7. Election Period (Purdah)

- 7.1 During the pre-election period, all press contact must comply with statutory restrictions on publicity.
- 7.2 No statements may be made that could be seen as supporting or opposing a candidate or political party.

8. Breaches of this Policy

- 8.1 Any councillor who makes unauthorised statements purporting to represent the Council may be subject to:
- A formal complaint under the Code of Conduct
 - A Council resolution restricting their role in communications
 - Referral to the Monitoring Officer where appropriate